# Being Disliked by the "major players" was to the MLP's credit!

The article below is taken from a message thread on the Leninist-International list.

Hi [Another] and other readers,

Again I must apologize that it has taken me so long to reply.

#### [Another] posting on August 3:

>By the way, I very much liked your post on "Death of a Charlatan [Hardial Bails]," which I passed to a number of friends. However, if I understood correctly, you came out of the MLP, which, besides its anti-Stalinist turn, had a very suspicious history (I can document this) and was also never taken seriously by any other forces within the US. I would like to hear more of what you think of this, either through the list or directly.

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#### [Another] (August 8):

>First, on the group in Nicaragua; yes it is true that they supported the imperialist coalition in the elections that defeated the Sandinistas. However, they were a group that, at least in the US was mainly promoted by the MLP, an organization which as I said before never had any political legitimacy. I do not know whether the group in Nicaragua was ever "for real" or not.

#### [Ben Replies:]

My opinion [Another], is that you are misinformed about the MLP. I was a supporter of the MLP from 1978 until its dissolution in November 1993. For approximately half of that time I was a member. The MLP was definitely "for real" and so was the party in Nicaragua, MAP-ML with which we established relations.

You are raising very interesting questions and I am grateful to have an opportunity to clear up any questions that anyone may have about the MLP. My view, as many are aware, is that the communications revolution is going to lead to a quantitative and qualitative change in the communist movement. This is still in its very earliest stages—but already we can all see significant changes in the way that information is becoming accessible. The left ecosystem is in the process of becoming "transparent" and, in my view, it is only a matter of time before this changes everything.

The example of Hardial Bains is instructive. Our movement has suffered much from charlatanism and

many other diseases. But these diseases will not survive the advent of transparency. Charlatanism and sectarianism will be the first to go. We can already see the beginnings of this. The intensity of the class struggle in society will determine the pace of the next step. But whether it is fast or slow, it will happen; as surely as the day follows night, the influence of reformism will be punctured.

Consider: for years you have been carrying around in your head what appears to be a very inaccurate picture of the MLP. And now it can be cleared up ;-)

The nature of the way that information has been and will be transmitted within the left is critical. The "left ecosystem" created in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a great deal of unprincipled sectarian street-fighting. This was the environment which has shaped us all. The first casualty of war is the truth. And our experience is that activists and workers would get accurate information about who and what we were — only from our own efforts.

I believe it is accurate to say that the MLP was intensely disliked by every "major player" within the various mass movements. And we certainly did not have "political legitimacy" in the sense of your meaning above.

But the question that must be asked is whether this was to our credit. I know that there were many mass actions, sponsored by dozens of organizations of various kinds, where we would not allow the name of our organization to appear on the official leaflet announcing the event, but would instead create our own leaflet — with slogans which we felt did not in some essential way deceive the masses — and which our minuscule organization would distribute in greater number than <u>all</u> the official sponsoring organizations combined. Now the activists who might come to the demo because they heard about it from us would understand that our activity was working to build the demo and build the movement. But the official leadership of the demo generally would not appreciate our efforts.

I vividly recall a large demonstration in support of the struggle of the people of El Salvador. This was probably around 1981. The banner of our contingent read: "Down with US Imperialism! Victory to the people of El Salvador". This slogan was not acceptable to the official sponsors of the demo, an organization named "Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador" (CISPES). The problem was that we were using a banned ultra-left word: "imperialism". And the banned I-word was not acceptable to the allies of CISPES within the Democratic Party (people such as Mike Lowry — who later became Governor — and others). A CISPES representative informed us that we would have to remove our banner.

Now I should add that our banner was at the periphery of the demo. We weren't trying to take over the stage or anything like that. Rather, we believed that activists should be given a clear explanation of <u>why</u> the US was trying to crush the struggle of the Salvadoran people. And any scientific answer to that question had to explain the nature of the political and economic <u>system</u> that was behind this. And that system had a scientific name. And that scientific name was "imperialism".

We told the representative from CISPES that we believed that the demonstration was not the property of any organization because no one could own it. We said it was our democratic right to give anti-intervention activists our view on why the US was carrying out this brutal war. And we explained that we would defend our democratic right. Minutes later CISPES sent over the "goon squad".

Now this turned out to be something of a joke. The "goon squad" consisted of young activists who had been warned the night before by CISPES that it might be necessary to defend the demo against people who might try to disrupt it. These young activists had been led to believe that the disruption might be something organized by reactionaries. They were shocked when they discovered that they were being asked to violently suppress our banner. They could not see what was wrong with the word "imperialism" and agreed with us that we had every right in the world to have such a banner at a demo that was, after all, being organized against imperialist intervention. In fact I knew one of these activists and had had many political discussions with him in the weeks leading up to the demo. I had told him during these discussions that the anti-intervention movement could only be effective if it fought to be independent of its liberal "friends" in the Democratic Party who would undermine it once the time was ripe. This activist now saw with his own eyes the utter spinelessness of CISPES and he was (quite correctly) disgusted by what he saw.

It is probably not necessary to say that actions of this type did not endear us to organizations like CISPES. And, from the perspective of groups such as this, we never did have "legitimacy". But I would argue that this was to our credit.

And the <u>same dynamic</u> exists (to a much smaller degree — because there is no movement and the stakes are not so high) even today. On the old M-I list I argued that the decisive task to rebuild a communist movement must be to create organization that was independent of bourgeois control --- and that organizations like the Labor Party (in the US) and Jesse Jackson's campaign in 1988 were not independent of bourgeois control. As a result of this, I aroused the wrath of a respected and skilled contributor to M-I, Louis Proyect, who was moved to declare that I "have absolutely no credentials in the mass movement" and was a "political virgin". (Anyone can check this out themselves at www.Leninism.org/stream/ 98/reformism.htm where I have collected a number of posts from all sides of this tempest in a teacup - please see the conclusion of post #33). I think anyone will be able to see for themselves that I was not trying to provoke Louis and was treating him with respect --- but that my political stand in favor of independence from bourgeois control places me on one side of the major fault line that runs through all the mass movements. And this is the source of the contradiction.

### Suspicious history?

I should respond, [Another], to your query about the "suspicious history" of the MLP. In the early 1970s we attempted to merge with an organization that turned out to be cops.<sup>1</sup> I don't know much about this because it was before my time. But it is likely the source of stories about us that would be distorted or exaggerated in the sectarian atmosphere of the movement at that time. Also, at one time we supported Jonas Savimbi and UNITA in Angola. This was only a year or so before it was revealed that he was in a secret alliance with the CIA and South Africa. So this could be a source of rumors also.

Both of these incidents reflected inexperience and poor judgement on our part. But it is clear to me that the enmity we earned from the official leaders of the movement was not because of what we did that was wrong but because of what we did that was right.

## Dissolution of the MLP

The MLP dissolved itself in November 1993.

My view is that the MLP died because, as an organization, it lacked the courage to face up to its internal contradictions.

I was at the final congress and took part in the discussion leading up to it. Eventually all of this material will be posted on the web.

Unfortunately, most of the members and supporters of the MLP went passive at that time. Approximately onethird of the 40 members and supporters of the MLP are still politically active as follows: 1) The Communist Voice Organization (Joseph Green, Mark and a few others at www.flash.net/~comvoice). Mostly, this descended from the Detroit branch of the MLP but it also includes supporters from a few other cities, including Seattle. Joseph was the head of the Central Committee of the MLP.

2) The Chicago Workers' Voice group: www.mcs.com/~mlbooks Descended from the Chicago branch of the MLP. They put out a journal approximately twice a year.<sup>2</sup> One of their supporters is Jack Hill who is subbed to this list.

3) Neil (who sometimes contributes here) at: 74742.1651@compuserve.com ... in Los Angeles. He is now affiliated with the "communist-left" at: http:// www.ibrp.org. Neil's activity, in my view, is not at all representative of the quality of work which characterized the MLP.

4) Myself.

Both the Detroit and Chicago groups wrote articles in the summer of 1996 on the nature of the Labor Party in the US and these articles can be found at www.Leninism.org/ stream/98/reformism.htm (see posts #34 and #35). I consider both of these articles to be well-written and accurate.

My opinion is that, unfortunately, many of the former supporters of the MLP who are still active — have not proven resistant to the disease of sectarianism. This disease can be cured but often it simply lingers for year after year. One symptom of this is that most of these people refuse to have anything to do with me, saying that I am conducting a "war on Marxism" or similar nonsense. The reason for this is that I have put out polemics which have criticized them with great accuracy and they find it hard to deal with this. In fact, some of these polemics form "The Self-Organizing Moneyless Economy" which can be seen at: www.Leninism.org/some.

There has been a fair amount of discussion on these lists concerning exactly what sectarianism is. I believe a useful way to understand it is as a failure to see the possibilities of principled cooperation with activists that one considers to be profoundly mistaken. As I have said, I believe forums such as this one will help many to overcome this disease.

As far as dealing with passivity, my view is that what is important is to show that revolutionary work can still be done: that it does not have to be excruciatingly difficult and that it will accomplish something very worthwhile. Most of the pain is a result of the self-deception, sectarianism or ideological problems that are symptoms of the crisis in communist theory. I believe that as it becomes more clear that revolutionary work can be done — that more people will join in the effort, including, maybe, some of the former supporters of the MLP who have become passive.

The main vehicle for my work will be the web-based news service.

As far as the stand in the elections of the Nicaraguan group, MAP-ML, my memory of this is dim and I have no hard information about it. All the same, in the light of my experience I consider it highly likely that the accusation that they "supported the imperialist coalition" is nothing but a gross distortion. What is more likely is that they did not support the Sandinistas. And this is not the same thing. What we would need here would be some hard information.

# Ben Seattle

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(1) CWVTJ will discuss this incident in a later article. There were two FBI-created organizations that tried to infiltrate a predecessor of the MLP in the early 1970's. These groups were welcomed by Hardial Bains but ACWM(ML) was suspicious of them. I believe that they did not succeed in penetrating the MLP's predecessors. They were soon exposed. However, they may have penetrated Bains' group, the CP of Canada (ML). While the FBI may or may not have done any damage to our Canadian comrades, CPC(ML) certainly damaged COUSML by implying at the time that their American comrades were the source of the FBI infiltration.

(2) Actually this is supposed to be a quarterly journal but we won't get four issues out this year.